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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Tuesday, May 25, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Strawberry season rarely comes around without bringing one inquiry at least about an old-fashioned method of making preserves. Sure enough this question popped up in the week's mailbag. A listener writes: "Will you tell me how to make those strawberry preserves that are cooked in the sun?"

I will -- but I am in duty bound to warn you in advance that sun-cooking is a lengthy and rather fussy process, that you will need perfect fruit, and that you will need the weatherman's O.K. before you start. Sun-cooked preserves require 2 to 3 days of good strong sunshine. A damp day can play havoc with a nice batch of preserves because they mold so easily. If you have started a batch and then find the sun going under and clouds gathering, better bring the mixture indoors and finish the cooking on the faithful stove. But sun-cooking does give strawberry preserves a delicious flavor, as our grandmothers discovered long ago.

Here are the directions for sun-cooked preserves. Use large, firm, tart berries. Wash, drain, and remove caps. To each pound of berries, allow 1 pound of sugar and 1 teaspoon lemon juice. The lemon juice helps clarify and makes the color more brilliant. Prepare a sirup of juice and sugar. Crush small berries, cook 3 minutes while stirring, and strain. Make a heavy sirup of one-fourth cup juice to 1 pound sugar. Add sugar to juice, stir, heat slowly until sugar dissolves. Drop in the berries and simmer 3 to 5 minutes. Drain the berries from the sirup and place about an inch apart on shallow enameled pans or china platters. Boil the sirup for about 10 minutes until it is fairly thick. Remove scum, add lemon juice, and pour the sirup in a thin layer over the berries on the pan or platter. Cover with window glass propped up about one-fourth inch from the plate. Place in sun for 2 or 3 days, or until sirup forms a jelly mass. After each day's sunning, turn the berries over. Each night bring the berries inside. Without reheating, put the preserves into hot sterilized jars and seal.

Second question: "Is it possible to preserve fruit-juice to use for jelly-making later in the season?"

Answer: Yes, indeed. The jelly-makers at the Bureau of Home Economics say that by putting up fruit juice this way you can handle large quantities of fruit during the rush season and then make up the jelly in small lots at your leisure. Here's the way to put up the fruit juice for jelly. Fill hot sterilized glass jars with the juice.

Then partially seal the jar, and place it on a rack in a water-bath at 185 degrees Fahrenheit or simmering temperature. Have the water cover the jars an inch or two and bring the water again to simmering.

Keep at this temperature for 20 minutes for pint and quart sizes. Now seal the jars tightly and store in a cool dry place protected from light. Light, you know, is likely to fade the color of fruit juice.

Jelly made from fruit juice which has been stored as much as 6 months may have as good texture as jelly from fresh juice. But the color and flavor may have changed somewhat. This is especially true in the case of red fruits.

By the way, the method for preserving fruit juice which I have just given is not for beverage juice. This method brings out the pectin in the juice needed for jelly-making. In putting up juice just for a beverage, you don't need to bring out the pectin so can use less heat in processing.

Here is a letter asking how to tell when fruit juice and sugar has cooked to the jellying point. That is another good jelly-season question. Many jelly failures have been the result of taking the sirup from the stove at the wrong time -- either too soon or not soon enough. You need a trained eye and good judgment to know the exact moment when boiling fruit juice arrives at the jelly stage. The most practical test for jelly is the "sheeting off" test. You dip a large spoon into the boiling sirup, lift it up and let the sirup run off the side of the spoon. As the sirup cooks down, it reaches a stage when it no longer runs off the spoon in a steady stream, but separates into 2 distinct lines of drops which "sheet" together. Stop the cooking as soon as the boiling sirup shows this "sheeting-off."

Another jelly question: "Does green fruit make the best jelly?"

I assume that this listener is speaking of unripe fruit rather than fruit of a green color. The answer is: Slightly underripe fruit gives the most pectin and acid, while ripe fruit provides more color and flavor. So for fine jelly that has not only the pectin and acid for jelling but also the natural fruit color and flavor, use some fruit that is slightly underripe and some that is ripe.

Very green or unripe fruits have little pectin but they contain a substance that gradually turns into pectin. Then, when the fruit is fully ripe the pectin begins to disappear. It changes chemically into another substance and loses its jelly-making power. This explains why dead-ripe fruit will not make jelly.

That finishes the questions and answers for today.

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